

**Texas Department of Health
Accent on Health
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Texas Department of Health offers Five Lifesavers for New Year

It's that time of year when people make resolutions. You know the vows: clean out the garage, keep in better touch with friends and family, save money.

But there are some health and fitness resolutions that could save your life, according to Texas Commissioner of Health Eduardo Sanchez, M.D.

"If people would remember to do just five things, they could live longer, healthier lives," Sanchez said.

The five are:

- Eat smart;
- Get fit;
- Get shots;
- Get checkups and screens; and
- Don't smoke.

Each of these suggestions alone is good for anyone to consider, Sanchez said. But together they provide a solid plan to help a person get healthy and stay that way.

First, more than 60 percent of the people in Texas are overweight or obese. Preliminary analysis by the Texas Department of Health (TDH) suggests that overweight and obesity cost an estimated \$10.2 billion in 2001 in Texas.

Healthy benefits come, nutritionists say, if people eat five to nine servings of fruit and vegetables a day. Other good choices include eating whole grains; taking smaller portions; selecting lean meat, fish and poultry; and reducing or eliminating fat, fried foods, sugar and salt.

In addition to an improved immune system, people who eat smart may avoid or delay problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol and triglycerides (fats in the blood) that can lead to heart disease and stroke.

Next, are you having trouble getting moving? You are not alone. Urban sprawl means more time in the car for many, and busy schedules make getting fit a challenge.

Think about ways you can start slowly and build your activity level. Just 30 minutes of moderate to brisk exercise daily can strengthen your heart.

"Make it a family activity," Sanchez said. "Try fun runs, walks and other activities that can include family members of all ages."

Third, getting shots is something many adults don't think about; but pneumonia, one of the most serious infections for seniors, is easily prevented with a vaccine. While an influenza vaccine can't always completely cover all strains circulating, it does provide protection, and is especially important for those at risk of serious complications or death.

"Check with your health care provider about what shots are recommended and when," Sanchez said. "Most adults should get vaccinated against pneumonia and flu, especially those over age 65."

Or when is the last time you had a tetanus shot? The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends adults get a booster every 10 years.

Fourth on the list is getting checkups and screens. Many people don't visit a doctor until a problem occurs. This procrastination can be deadly.

Pap smears, mammograms and colorectal exams can detect cancerous activity early when treatment is most effective. Tests for cholesterol, triglyceride levels and blood pressure, along with a family history, can indicate if you are at risk for heart disease. People at risk of developing diabetes can prevent serious complications or death if the disease is diagnosed and managed.

And finally, it's been repeated often; but, again, smoking is bad for your health. Tobacco use can lead to deadly diseases such as lung cancer, emphysema and stroke. When quitting, ask your doctor if nicotine replacement products are a good idea, get a friend to remind you of all the benefits of being smoke-free, and be patient – many people quit several times before they kick the habit for good.

"Make 2004 a year for positive behavioral change," Sanchez said. "You just may save your life."

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(News media: for more information contact Andrea Morrow, TDH External Relations, at 512-458-7400.)

Tips for Eating Smart

- Reduce portion size. If you eat out, order smaller portions or divide your entrée and take half home.
- Drink fewer sodas. Over a year's time, one can of regular cola a day at 150 calories equals more than 15 pounds worth of calories.
- Write down what you eat. You may be surprised by the incidental calories – a bag of chips here, some candy there, really add up.

- Add fruit and vegetables. Substitute dried fruit for candy, add vegetables to soups, pasta, stir-fry dishes or casseroles.
- Limit snack foods, foods high in fat or sugar and processed foods since they have more calories and fewer nutrients.

Tips for getting fit

- Take a step in the right direction. Walking 10,000 steps a day (about five miles) helps to maintain a healthy weight. A pedometer will help you determine your steps.
- Go it on foot. Take the stairs instead of elevators, park farther from your destination and walk. Encourage your children to walk to school where feasible, walk or ride a bicycle for short trips instead of taking the car. It all adds up.
- Start small. Incorporate 10 minutes of exercise a day at first, then gradually build to half an hour a day to maintain weight or an hour a day to lose weight.
- The more television a child watches, the more likely he or she is to be obese. Consider activities as a family such as going to the zoo or park, playing catch or skating.

Tips for quitting smoking

- For some people drinking coffee, driving or watching TV triggers a desire to smoke. Identify triggers for smoking and avoid or modify behavior.
- Choose healthy alternatives such as drinking water, taking a walk, or going to the movies or a library where smoking is not allowed.
- Be patient, most people make several attempts before they are able to quit permanently.
- Seek out a supportive friend or family member or call the American Cancer Society's Quitline at 1-877-937-7848 for help.